

“Love’s Philosophy”

Percy Bysshe Shelley

The fountains mingle with the river.
And the rivers with the ocean,
The winds of heaven mix for ever
With a sweet emotion;
Nothing in the world is single,
All things by a law divine
In one spirit meet and mingle.
Why not I with thine?

See the mountains kiss the high heaven
And the waves clasp one another:
No sister-flower would be forgiven
If it disdained its brother,
And the sunlight clasps the earth.
And the moon beams kiss the sea:
What is all this sweet work worth?
If thou kiss not me?



“Everything starts in the Mind” could not be more apposite to the creative artist. As a tapestry weaver the gestation period of an initial idea being taken from the research, through drawing and painting, to the selection and rejection of a colour scheme and finally being introduced to the loom can be many months. This is a valuable process for it enables previous knowledge and experience to be considered. Time allows for a careful and thoughtful assessment and it may be that a decision not to proceed is taken. I live with my preparatory work, the words, the images, structures and forms, and the colour swatches for I must be crystal clear in my aims and objectives. Using all my senses I am constantly attuned to absorbing the sights, sounds and the contributions made by others in the world we live. I am an observer, an onlooker and through this process ideas are considered. Many are rejected but a few grab my attention, they gnaw at my reasoning and thoughts and begin to be developed and matured. I often find that I am preoccupied with more than

one theme whose concepts and ideas are different and this breadth of thinking makes a contribution to my whole being as a creative person. For me it is a journey which will never end, an ongoing experience whose destination is never reached. Who was it who said that “it is not the arrival but the journey itself that is important”?

The above poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822), one of the romantic poets of his age, has struck a chord with me. For it includes a number of the concepts and themes which have for many years occupied my thinking and have been expressed through my water colours and woven tapestries. I feel that in my work I too have aimed at creating a feeling for the enigmatic which is both inspiring and will outlast time. There is certainly an interchange and relationship with nature, and in certain instances aspects of ecstasy, introspection and brooding. Whilst the curved line is so characteristic within my weaving it is symbolic of the feeling for restlessness and probing. Always thought provoking and questioning, of visual creativity and imagination. Shelley added the “untamed spirit ever in search of freedom” and the “pursuit of ideal love” in his writings and of which I shall endeavour to include something in my designs

My starting point for the visual images will be a return to earlier pieces, especially my 1994 theme of “Moonlight”. I shall be renewing these ideas and concepts which linked the Moon to the Earth, the feminine and the maleness and their interchange with both the physical natural world and the spiritual domain. It seems impossible to include all that this poem offers and therefore I shall be concentrating on a couple of lines which intrigue and tantalise my thoughts, and which will challenge me in many directions. The line “And the Sunlight clasps the earth” must also be incorporated somehow. The combination of both the male and female, the Sun and Moon, within the same design contains powerful concepts and notions. They are thrown together, they confront each other amid a whirligig of ideas and succeed in creating a depth of meaning and understanding. These two content symbols help to generate tension and apprehension, harmony and contrast always questioning the meanings inculcated within the overall intentions.

The feminine “Moon” clearly visible and constantly changing its shape expresses its strength and power on earth through the invisible, the gravitational pull and the subsequent effects on tides and the weather patterns. It looks down on humanity and in return we look upwards, following its pathway across the night sky before finally disappearing when the “Sun” returns in the morning. Occasionally we witness its presence during the hours of daylight, a reminder of the oncoming night. A time when it is not alone in the night sky but takes its path through the myriad of stars and other interstellar heavenly bodies. To witness the rising full moon in the surroundings of the “Milky Way” in a location where light pollution does not occur is one of the wonders of the world. Are we viewing the future or the past? The intense depth of the blackness highlights the brightness of our circulating planets and the flickering, twinkling stars. A visual experience to rival and outshine all others and one which promotes many questions, thoughts and emotions. Descriptions, including both prose and poetry, illustrations and painting, photographs have over eons of time challenged and confronted the creative human spirit. On occasions the Moon and the Sun cross pathways creating a partial or total eclipse. For early man, so intimately linked with his surroundings and the environment was acutely aware of the cycles and seasons these events must have held a special if unexplained occurrence. It must have questioned their fundamental beliefs and challenged their thinking. This was something out of the normal, it was something which perhaps was a portent, a harbinger and an omen for the future. The lunar cycle with its predicted passage across the sky and its changing shape was now being questioned and queried. The status quo had been disturbed, these reliable and habitual events were they foretelling of future events? What momentous or

calamitous event was likely to happen? Was it to be ominous, threatening and disquieting or perhaps of benefit and ultimately of great value to the community?

The movement of clouds across the Moon add to the atmosphere. I liken it to the gradual opening of curtains where a glimpse of the outside or the future becomes visible. It offers a tantalising peek at the developing scene. This protecting veil controls just how much we see and hence how we have to think and increase our understanding from this partial view. Are we looking into the future? What is outside and beyond the immediate image?

Sometimes it is hidden completely, partially obscured, a circle or a scimitar, sometimes close to the horizon or in the high heavens. For me the combination of the Moon and bodies of water takes us further. Its reflections on the rippling waves, how it kisses and caresses the movements of the seas and how in still benign conditions its form is echoed in the dark waters have inspired artists and writers alike. The Norwegian artist, Edvard Munch described the Moon as “impregnating the earth”, the female Moon becoming the male through the elongation of the reflection. Here is the adjoining of male and female, a tender feeling, of the contemplation of passion and love and so beautifully captured by Shelley in his phrase,

“...the Sunlight clasps the earth

And the Moonbeams kiss the sea.”

The Sun on its daily path, of rising and falling and its path across the skies held an equal fascination. Its life giving heat and light could be seen and felt and over the annual cycle its movements and effects were observed with considerable interest. A circle of gold, always a circle and only rarely during an eclipse changing its form this daily event providing a constant, a stability of the passing of time. The maleness of the Sun clasps the earth, encompassing the whole natural world and expressing its dominance. We live, see and fully experience this phenomenon through the four elements and the four seasons.

“See the mountains kiss the high heaven

And the waves clasp each other.”

Once again we see the link between the natural and spiritual worlds. Both mountains, the high places and the seas borne waves demonstrate a dependence upon each other, not single entities or lone elements but individual yet part of a greater whole.

This interchange between man and nature can be seen through the power of visionary imagination and is contained within Shelley’s feelings for ecstasy, brooding and despair which are enigmatic, inspiring and lasting. There is an interchange between all these elements yet each still retains its own individuality and a separate identity. Combined and contrasted, in harmony and discord, in light and dark each offers much in exploring and discovering the human condition within a landscape full of hope and passion.

The visual effects which surround the manmade rock armoured groynes designed as coastline protection around Morecambe Bay change constantly with the tides. These rock structures have organic forms, their shapes are curving, sinuous and linear which help in deflecting the tidal flows. They help to control and contain the sand and shingle beaches and both visually and physically link the sea with the land. They enclose and protect, shelter and surround, restrain and suppress the power of the natural world. It is hardly surprising that these shaped defences fascinated me. Their curving lines on the grand scale echoing much of my drawing, painting and weaving. I

began to explore in a visual sense some of these with reference to my thoughts on “Love’s Philosophy”.

Initially I struggled to find a suitable means of drawing these structures. A single pencil line could describe the basic shape but multiple lines were required to create the whole mass. I was beginning to develop a very detailed and precise drawing. This was not what I wanted. I was seeking to make a single mark encompassing both the curvilinear and the overall mass. I attempted to utilise the broader edge of a pencil lowered to generate a thicker line. Although this was a possibility it did not fulfil my intention.

By using the side of a black wax crayon I achieved my aim and could explore these intriguing shapes. This was in a similar manner to my way of feeling for the shapes, contours and forms of landscape with a “finger”. This physical tracing with a finger is something I have used for many years as a prelude to drawing on paper. With the desired length of crayon on edge I am able to start with a specific width and following a chosen curve or curl tail off to a single narrow point or abrupt edge. This in one controlled single movement, positive and direct. A whole different world was opening up to me in which the opportunities are endless. A bonus of this method is that I found that I could create a stippled textural effect which was appropriate to illustrate that these structures were made from piles of rocks. This was extended by using different textured papers such as blotting paper and varieties of water colour paper. With this in mind I chose to explore not just the single shape but pairs or in three’s. With concepts such as protection, harmony and discord, growth, “containing” safe areas, revealing glimpses, controlling contours and tidal movements it has offered me much to consider. Initially I will use these forms in a vertical manner and add, supplement horizontals to indicate horizons, waves and ripples, and net constructions using the “curved” line. This way these local structures will lead me into the ideas and concepts, and include the many metaphors I seek

Let the journey continue.....

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Michael Crompton 2015 – 2016
High Warp Woven Tapestry approximate 70cms x 105cms